

235hh- Escape From The Body

By Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

(A Summarised Transcription of a Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

Right order, and non-delight in masculinity/femininity

"Bhikkhus, I will teach you a Dhamma exposition on union and disengagement...A man, bhikkhus, attends internally to his masculine faculty, his masculine comportment, his masculine appearance, his masculine aspect, his masculine desire, his masculine voice, his masculine ornamentation. He becomes excited by these and takes delight in them. Excited by them, taking delight in them, he attends externally to [a woman's] feminine faculty, her feminine comportment, her feminine appearance, her feminine aspect, her feminine desire, her feminine voice, her feminine ornamentation. He becomes excited by these and takes delight in them. Excited by them, taking delight in them, he desires union externally, and he also desires the pleasure and joy that arise on account of such union. Beings who are delighted with their masculinity enter upon union with women. It is in this way that a man does not transcend his masculinity. This is how union comes about." - [An7.51](#)

Ajahn Nyanamoli: The first thing you would notice there is that it is not about denying masculinity or femininity. It is about not carelessly becoming dependent upon the pleasures of the masculine body or the pleasures of the feminine body, which then results in seeking the external counterpart. So the whole point is to become developed in regard to your own body. It's not about saying "there is no gender, this masculinity is just an illusion." Yes, in a sense, there is no gender as in no gender that is yours, that can be owned by you - but factually, the body is so. It is such - with such hormones, with such predispositions, such height and shape and so on - and that's not a problem.

The problem is that there is a basis of pleasure that can arise on account of the body and your mind is not developed in regard to that. So when the prospect of pleasure makes itself apparent, you are accepting the body and accepting the ownership. You are carelessly identifying and taking up the ownership of whatever you are paired with - in this case, the masculine aspects. As a result, you seek pleasure even further outside, which is the counterpart for it. Again as a result of that, you seek the union and become dependent on the pleasure of the union and everything else; all the burdens that come with it.

All this is because you were not developed in regard to the initial prospect of pleasure that you were paired with. The body, whether masculine or feminine is the basis of a certain type of physical pleasure, for a man it is the basis of his masculinity, for a woman it is the basis of her femininity. And why is that prospect of pleasure not enough in itself? Why by default does an undeveloped mind seek the external counterpart? Why would you spill outside and seek union with the external?

It's because of a view. Because of the assumption of where the pleasure of a sensual kind is, that the pleasure is in the external sense objects, not on the level of your body. In the same sense that people

assume that *they* are accessing, seeing, perceiving, and owning the external objects; not that it is their senses seeing, perceiving, and owning.

In other words, your senses, your body, masculinity, or femininity; is invisible to you, because you have been carelessly cultivating actions towards that pleasure *out there*, which is also factual but is actually secondary to the pressure of the body, sense objects are secondary to the existence of the *patigha* (resistance-pressure) of your senses. The only reason you don't see that is because you keep assuming. You keep holding the view that *that* [out there] is first, and *this* [body here] is second. So [in the eyes of the assumption] *this* [I] gets attracted to *that* [out there] because of *that* [out there.] Thus, whatever is *here* is seen as second, and as insufficient. That is why you are not developed in regard to the body because you assume the wrong order, and the wrong order prevents the development.

But if you see: "Well, it doesn't matter how far out I reach and seek, the experience is bound within the framework of these senses. The only way I can know the external world is on account of these senses knowing the external world. This means that, for me, the assumption I had of the external world is actually pretty much inconceivable"...If then, you start thinking about it clearly, you realize all that was a complete misconception. All your assuming is internal to your senses, and that is all you can have.

But you will not be able to reach the basic level of this clarity if you are still *acting* on account of the assumption of the external coming first. And your body, your desire, the pressure being second - as just a response to the impulse. For as long as you keep that picture perverted, there is no development, there is no uprooting of sensuality, and there is no abandoning of masculinity or femininity.

"And at that time Venerable Vañgīsa became dissatisfied, as lust infected his mind. Then he addressed Ānanda in verse:

*"I am burning with sensual desire; My mind is on fire!
Please, out of compassion, Gotama, tell me how to quench the flames."*

*"Your mind is on fire because of a perversion of perception.
Keep away from the attractive feature of things, provoking lust.
See all Sankhara as other, as suffering and not-self.
Extinguish the great fire of lust, don't burn up again and again.
With a mind unified and serene, develop clarity in regard to the ugly aspects of the body.
While recollecting the body, be disenchanted.
Develop clarity in regard to the signless, give up the underlying tendency to conceit;
and when you comprehend conceit, you will live at peace." - [Sn8.4](#)*

Nm: Perversion of the order, means literally, putting that which is second as first.

Q: So what is first?

Nm. What is first is the framework of your senses, there is no outside of it, you are fully enclosed within it. You start recognizing that, and you will start experiencing deep anxiety because you realize you are utterly, utterly enclosed - trapped - within yourself. And any notion of the external world or external pleasure - it is not that it is "not real" - it's real, but it's also enclosed with you, it's within. [It's almost like a sense of being] 'buried alive' as we spoke before.

That's why underlying tendencies just push you in the direction of sensuality because if you resist it you are left with deep fear, pain, and terror. Your assumption is of the external world, and suddenly you see that it doesn't matter the extent of the universe you travel, it's within this body as the Buddha would say:

Once I was a seer named Rohitassa, a student of Bhoja, a powerful sky-walker. My speed was as fast as that of a strong archer—well-trained, a practiced hand, a practiced sharp-shooter—shooting a light arrow across the shadow of a palm tree. My stride stretched as far as the east sea is from the west. To me, endowed with such speed, such a stride, there came the desire: 'I will go traveling to the end of the world.' I—with a one-hundred-year life, a one-hundred-year span—spent one hundred years traveling—apart from the time spent on eating, drinking, chewing & tasting, urinating & defecating, and sleeping to fight off weariness—but without reaching the end of the world I died along the way. So it is amazing, lord, and awesome, how well that has been said by the Blessed One: 'I tell you, friend, that it is not possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the world where one does not take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear.'"

(When this was said, the Blessed One responded:) "I tell you, friend, that it is not possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the world where one does not take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear. But at the same time, I tell you that there is no making an end to suffering & stress without reaching the end of the world. Yet it is just within this fathom-long body, with its perception & intellect, that I declare that there is the world, the origination of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the world." - [An4.45](#)

When you actually take that in a realistic sense it is quite frightening for a mind that is not developed, for a mind that is still dependent on the pleasures of the external kind.

Q: You can't reach beyond your senses.

Nm: It's inconceivable, your thoughts can't even fathom the outside of it. The only way to do so is to misconceive it. And then through misconceiving, that misconception "exists" as such. That's why the Buddha said the form "finds footing" in existence, through misconceiving:

"Mendicant, this is not how the question should be asked: "Sir, where do these four primary elements cease without anything left over, namely, the elements of earth, water, fire, and air?"

This is how the question should be asked: "Where do water and earth, fire and air find no footing?"

-Dn11

So it exists then as external, although it can't - by not knowing that that is how it exists for you. That's the fundamental perversion of the order. Sensuality is that, *bhava* is that. So seeing that your senses come first - (and you can only see that if you have not been acting out of them if you have been withdrawn from that pressuring addiction of scratching the itch by external means) - when you see that, you start seeing that there is no outside of this, and even your thoughts of "outside"- it's not that you stop having them, you just see them correctly, as "within this."

So the clearer that becomes, the lesser the perversion you are living on a day-to-day basis, so to speak. Up to the point where the perversion would become completely eradicated - doesn't matter what you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think, you cannot fall back into the assumption of the wrong order, because the right order has been thoroughly understood, such that the perversion can't take place any more. And that's when you know you're free from *kamabhava*, from sensual craving and sensual being. The pleasure of the external kind was not the sensuality, it was because of the perversion of the order that the sensuality was there.

That's exactly what that sutta (AN 7.51) describes - through not being developed in regard to what comes first - for a man it's the masculine framework of the body and the senses; for a woman, it's the feminine framework of the body and the senses - you start spilling outside, assuming outside, becoming even more dependent on the outside.

Q: "Not being developed" means...?

Nm: Not seeing it clearly enough; not having practiced sense restraint; not having your mind developed in regard to the pressure, not having endured it patiently long enough, having been acting out of it. Or, having been keeping the precepts as a means of external duty, not as a means of direct development of your mind by not acting out of the pressure of the current sense. All of that is "not being developed in regard to your own masculinity or femininity." It means taking up the ownership of that, not being able to see it as impersonal, as *anicca*, as 'other'

Q: So he gives in, and delights in his masculine pressure.

Nm: You could just say "He takes his masculine pressure for granted." By default, his mind is already outside, attracted to those things, even if he is avoiding them. Because of taking the pressure for granted as "mine," as belonging to me, not having a mind developed in regard to that pressure, means the pressure will overwhelm the mind, the mind will not overwhelm the pressure. By default that will put you outside.

What needs to be sustained is not acting out of that pressure, but discerning it, and guarding the sense doors. That does not mean just “I keep the precepts because it’s my duty” but rather intentionally choosing to abstain from thinking about things that would be taking up the pressure; intentionally keeping an eye on your actions, decisions, on your choices, and responsibility behind in such a way that will make you *not* spill out towards the external world.

By sustaining this sufficiently you are becoming aware of what it is that you’ve been doing, that has been perpetuating your dependence on the pressure and the pleasure of the external world. Which is taking the pressure for granted, as yours. So you start allowing it to be, not trying to get rid of it so that you can endure it correctly, not act out of it correctly, and guard your sense doors in regard to it correctly. This means that you are taking up responsibility for it, and so you are not taking it for granted anymore.

Eventually, then you will be able to see it as not yours. It’s not that now you need to just “see it as not mine.” It is by not acting out of it, guarding your sense doors, taking responsibility for it, allowing it to endure, and not trying to get rid of it - all of these are ways of practicing [towards] “not mine.” When that is sufficiently cultivated, then that whole perverted order on account of taking up the pressure as mine would have faded or would have diminished sufficiently for you to see that it has diminished.

Correct practice of Asubha vs *sīlabbataparāmāso*

Q: There is an idea that one practices in such a way: “I have lust for a woman. So now I must contemplate the disgusting nature of a woman’s body.” [or the opposite.]

Nm: See, the problem with that is that it is taking it in the sense of an external duty that one must do. “When lust is present, I must do *this*.”

No - When lust is present you must acknowledge it, and recognize the mind of lust as the mind of lust. As opposed to - “Mind of lust - [I immediately turn away from it and] do this. The mind of non-lust - I do that. Either way, I will try to not be aware of myself because it’s too unpleasant.”
So when the mind of lust is there, that needs to be endured.

If you are jumping into the practice of “*asubha*” immediately, you are acting out of it. You are not allowing it to be for what it is - the phenomenon of lust, mind affected by lust - you’re just trying to get rid of it. Which is exactly the motion of sensuality - when lust is present you immediately jump into the sensuality to get rid of that painful itch. So now you learn that this is bad, and now you go “when lust is present what do I do?” And you jump into acting out [in another way] still to get rid of that painful itch.

Those are the two extremes that people end up going towards, by not understanding the middle way: either scratch the itch or try to deny the itch. People’s practice of *asubha* often falls on the level of just trying to deny the itch. That is not *asubha*, it is not uprooting of the lust, it’s just managing it. It is not even good management, because it will come back, and the “*asubha*” will lose effectiveness the more you do it rooted in wrong reasons.

So the mind of lust is present; then the first thing you know is “okay, I should not act out of this. But I should do *asubha* - when the mind of lust is NOT present.” Otherwise, your practice of *asubha* is rooted in lust, trying to deny the lust. And why would you try to deny the lust? Because you don’t want to endure it. The first step of patient endurance is what you do not even want to do. So all the subsequent steps are based on *sīlabbataparāmāso* - avoiding responsibility for the first step of patiently enduring it, not trying to get rid of it.

“Patient endurance is the ultimate austerity.

Nibbana is the ultimate, say the Buddhas.

No true renunciate is violent or hostile to an other” -[Dhp 184](#)

Q: Again, you have the underlying tendency towards lust, whereas lust is not exactly active now but one can still see that one is liable to lust. So now I can contemplate *asubha*.

Nm: Exactly, so there is no “mind of lust” actively present, but if I ask “am I free from lust? Well...” So now you should contemplate and try to redefine the framework of attractive by seeing it as unattractive, create a broader context of unattractive - because that is there. Just you haven’t been looking at those aspects. But you can only do that right when the mind is properly established; i.e. when you are not rooted in trying to get rid of things, that lazy avoidance of endurance.

Q: Properly established means “being able to patiently endure.”

Nm: To have not acted out of it, so that you are not gripped by lust. And in that frame of mind, you can contemplate - contemplate the *asubha*, contemplate the danger, all of these things. Then when the ‘activated’ lust comes back, you wouldn’t need to be asking “oh, what do I do now?” Because if you had sufficiently contemplated the nature of that which is lustful, it will be implicit in that lust.

So that which was lustful comes now with an even richer background of “unattractive” because that is what you have been cultivating. It’s about rewriting the significance of things. Through that significance of lust, there is also seen the further significance of danger, unattractive, not worthy, to be avoided, to be not acted upon. And the clearer that broader context becomes, the more impossible it would be for you to put that superficial aspect of lust first and ignore all the context as secondary. In other words, your mind is becoming imperturbable in regard to lust because that context is becoming established and it’s not moving. It doesn’t matter how forceful, how quick, or how sharp the lust might be, the context remains first. That is when the mind is settled in the right order, and it cannot tip over anymore.

Q: Some might want to contemplate the disgusting nature of *another person’s* body. Is it not better to look at this body, your body?

Nm: Well, first, if you are doing it based on a mind that is not affected by lust at the time, you can do it either internally or externally; it doesn’t matter. If you do it externally your body will be included in that

contemplation; if you do it internally other's bodies will be included in that - as long as it is not done based on lust and trying to avoid the endurance of a mind of lust or any other unwholesome hindrance.

"And how does disengagement come about? A man, bhikkhus, does not attend internally to his masculine faculty ... his masculine ornamentation. He does not become excited by these or take delight in them. Not excited by them, not taking delight in them, he does not attend externally to [a woman's] feminine faculty ... her feminine ornamentation. He does not become excited by these or take delight in them. Not excited by them, not taking delight in them, he does not desire union externally, nor does he desire the pleasure and joy that arise on account of such union. Beings who are not delighted with their masculinity become disengaged from women. It is in this way that a man transcends his masculinity."

"This is how disengagement comes about." - [An7.51](#)

Nm: "not delighting" is about not taking it for granted. The pressure, the possibilities of pleasure that your masculine form offers you, you need to practice non-interest, non-zeal towards those. Do not take them for granted but actually start contemplating and regarding them as perilous.

That's basically not using your body for the sake of gaining external pleasures...

Q: That you can never gain.

Nm: You can never gain them because it is already a perverted order, but if you don't understand that, then you would be established, based upon, dependent upon the form that you have; masculine or feminine. You took it for granted, took ownership of it. That's the root of all the beautification, the anxiety you have if it gets sick, the suffering of the senses failing, all of that is on the level of when you already took it for granted.

So you cannot just say "I will un-take it" - or "I will just let go of it" -it's not a matter of direct choice. But what you can do is first, stop acting out of the form being taken for granted; i.e. stop acting towards external pleasures, start practicing sense restraint, endure your senses and their own *patigha*, endure the pressure, and try to see it as impersonal as possible.

Then if you become more accustomed to this, (which is what *samadhi* is, basically - being unmoved, by having sufficiently endured it)- that is, more accustomed to the interior of your senses (which is all you ever had, there is no "exterior" to your own experience, it's a contradiction in terms) then, being accustomed to this, stop resisting it, you can see it as simply "a thing there."

So it doesn't mean "I need to become feminine in order to overcome my masculinity" or vice versa, no - that's just you acting out of whatever you have, trying to deny it with the opposite. All you need to do is stop taking it for granted and stop assuming ownership of it.

Opening amidst confinement and practice of *jhana*

"This was said, friend, by the young deva Pañcāla-candā:

"The sage, the withdrawn chief bull, the Buddha who has understood jhāna, the One of Broad Wisdom has found the opening amid confinement.' "What, friend, has the Blessed One spoken of as confinement and what as the achievement of an opening amid confinement?"

"The Blessed One, friend, has spoken of these five objects of sensual pleasure as confinement. What five?

Sights known by the eye that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing.

Sounds known by the ear ... Smells known by the nose ... Tastes known by the tongue ... Touches known by the body that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing.

These are the five kinds of sensual pleasures that are called 'confinement' by the Buddha.

Now, take a mendicant who, quite secluded from sensual pleasures ... enters and remains in the first jhana. To this extent the Buddha spoke of creating an opening amid confinement in a qualified sense...."

-[An9.42](#)

Nm: The opening is not finding another direction apart from the senses, or denial of the senses. The "opening amidst confinement" is the removal of the ownership of that which confines you. Complete non-appropriation - which begins with the first *jhana*.

So it's not like you find the opening in the aggregates by which you can sort of "slip out" of samsara. No, you are confined by everything that appears. *Nama-rupa paccaya vinnana. Vinnana paccaya nama-rupa* - that is the ultimate confinement. So what is, then, the "opening" amidst that, the opening within already being fully buried alive - it is the removal of the ownership of that situation in its entirety. That's why in the first *jhana* there is no sense of "I am" as in "I am entering the first *jhana*". It's not that there is no sense of the five senses - there is, but there's no ownership of it. There are thoughts and thinking, but the traces of ownership have been completely removed on every level. Thus, nobody is confined; there is no confinement anymore. For something to be confined, you need that which confines and that one which is confined, the assumed sense of self. Complete removal of that ownership and conceit is the subtlest of the openings, so to speak, amidst everything that confines.

Q: That's why it says that the first *jhana* is an opening, that escape - but now, as the sutta continues to state, could one see that there is still confinement there?

Nm: Yes, but now it is getting abstract. If a person develops the first *jhana* they will understand what is the true *okāsā* (opening) among *sambādhe* (confinement) then the principle of other *jhanas* will become apparent. But if somebody tries to understand this [on an abstract level] "This opening and this confinement, then this further opening and this confinement" - none of that will become applicable.

The opening, the escape, from that which confines, is the removal, uprooting, and fading away of ownership and conceit in regard to the senses and their pleasure that you have been depending on. That's why the first *jhana* is enough for arahantship. If you establish your mind upon that first escape and spend a sufficient amount of time in it, you will have uprooted any lust towards anything that was confining you before. But yes, theoretically speaking, one who is established in the first *jhana* can start thinking about whether there is a more refined opening or escape in regard to this. From the point of view of the second *jhana*, the first is very coarse; from the point of view of the third *jhana*, the second is very coarse, and so on.

So you can use that principle to *remove the ownership*. *Jhana* in itself does not necessarily bring the full uprooting of the sense of "I am" and the sense of "mine." For that you need wisdom. Theoretically, a person could have *jhanas* without having fully uprooted their underlying tendencies.

Q: So here I am with a pressure of the body, and I want to satisfy it, get rid of that pressure, and feel pleasure rather than this pressure.

Nm: Why is that? What is the burden? It is confinement, you are confined by this pressure, so what do you do? You try to get rid of the pressure by spilling out, letting it outside. That's why you won't find the true opening amidst confinement because you keep acting towards the assumed "opening." The sense pleasures of the external kind are the assumed relief of the pressure here. And that's why people are so psychologically dependent on "scratching the itch." That is the only form of release that they know.

But it is not a release - it's the very reason for your confinement.

The more you try to find release in that way, the more burdened you become, the more dependent on sensuality you become. That's why it's important to realize that this needs to be lived on the level of enduring the pressure, not acting out of it, and calming your mind within it. Withdrawal from the dependence on the pleasure of the assumed external kind is the prerequisite for that pleasure of *jhana*, that genuine release.

"As long as these five hindrances are not given up inside themselves, a mendicant regards them as a debt, a disease, a prison, slavery, and a desert crossing.

But when these five hindrances are given up inside themselves, a mendicant regards this as freedom from debt, good health, release from prison, emancipation, and sanctuary.

Seeing that the hindrances have been given up in them, joy springs up. Being joyful, happiness springs up. When the mind is full of happiness, the body becomes calm. When the body is calm, they feel bliss. And when blissful, the mind becomes composed.

Quite withdrawn from sense pleasures, withdrawn from unwholesome states, he enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thought and thinking and filled with the joy and happiness born of withdrawal..." - Dn10

Withdrawing from unwholesome, from the wrong order that you have been assuming, that is the work, and the release of the right kind will occur as a result of it. That's the true "opening amidst confinement." But people don't want to deal with the confinement. They don't want to deal with the pressure or endure it - they want a technique that will give them an experience of pleasure that they will then take to be *jhana*, and then assume that all this work has been done, on account of this special meditation pleasure that they had. That is exactly mirroring the same principle of the sensuality that you have been acting out of. You are still seeking that pleasant thing to be your escape. No - the escape is found by not being, not maintaining, the dependence upon the wrong order. Then the pleasure of *jhana* will happen:

"Quite withdrawn from sense pleasures, withdrawn from unwholesome states, he enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thought and thinking and filled with the joy and happiness born of withdrawal."

It does not say: "Not having been withdrawn, still being pressured by sensuality, he gets a technique, he experiences *jhana* and all his problems just falls away, and it's a magical experience."
